



East Lyme Youth Services

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Sarah Firmin, Wellness & Prevention Coordinator
East Lyme Youth Services Bureau

Concerning

Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services- RBHAO Funding
Appropriations Health Subcommittee Public Hearing, February 28, 2023

Senators Osten, Marx and Somers, Representatives Walker, Dillon and Foncello and Esteemed Members of the Appropriations Health Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony concerning the budget proposal for the Dept. of Mental Health and Addiction Services and specifically to ask for your support in providing funding of \$200,000 to each of the state's Regional Behavioral Action Organization (RBHAOs).

My name is Sarah Firmin, and I am the Wellness & Prevention Coordinator for East Lyme Youth Services and Chair of East Lyme's Youth Coalition. I am here today to specifically support Southeastern Regional Council (SERAC) and the work they do in East Lyme and Salem.

SERAC has been working with the towns of East Lyme and Salem since 2008. This partnership has allowed East Lyme Youth Services and the East Lyme Youth Coalition to better serve these communities with additional funding through the Local Prevention Council and State Opiate Response grants. SERAC has also provided assessments at the community and school-based levels, which assists us in collecting valuable data to assess the substance misuse and mental health needs within our communities. Additionally, SERAC often offers trainings on various topics which has been fundamental in increasing awareness, education, and prevention strategies for coalition members, school administrators, students, parents, and caregivers, as well as members of the community.

Most recently in our communities, alcohol was identified as the most used substance among East Lyme/Salem youth. With marijuana identified as the second most used substance. Over the last two years, our community has seen a significant increase in mental health needs, with 20.7% students reporting feelings of harming themselves, 17.4% reporting feeling sad and/or hopeless, and 28.2% reporting they often or almost always keep their feelings to themselves.

We urge you to support the RBHAOs and provide funding so communities can continue to ensure there is necessary programs, initiatives, and local community prevention work taking place throughout the state to continue to meet the overall needs of communities.

Thank you for your attention to the RBHAOs and I welcome any questions.

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MISSION STATEMENT

to foster the positive development of youth by providing, and/or coordinating preventative, remedial, educational, social, and service opportunities for young people and support for their families.

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